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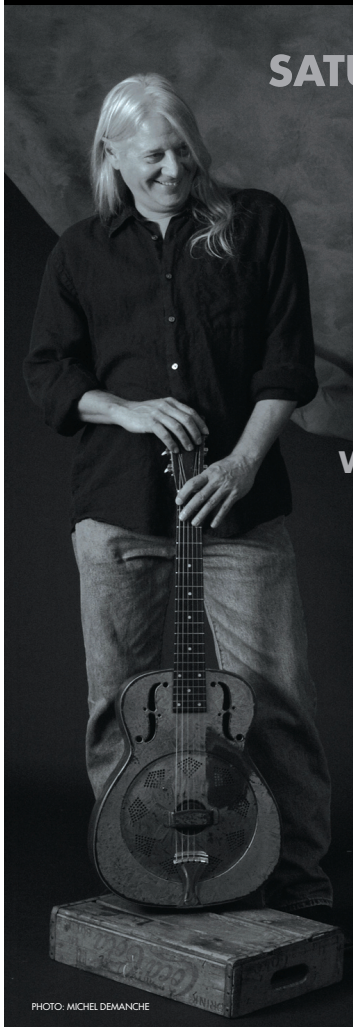
THE SALISBURY UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC PRESENTS

BLUES IN THE BLACK BOX

CHRIS ENGLISH

PLAYS AN EVENING OF TRADITIONAL AND ORIGINAL BLUES



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2011
8 P.M.

BLACK BOX THEATRE
FULTON HALL
SALISBURY UNIVERSITY

WITH SPECIAL APPEARANCES BY:

TED NICHOLS
WITH SU'S AFRICAN DRUM ENSEMBLE

NANCY MITCHELL
RECITING BLUES POETRY

THE CHRIS ENGLISH BAND
AND FRIENDS

A BENEFIT CONCERT FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

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PROGRAM

SU's African Drum Ensemble.....Directed by Ted Nichols

Brian Alexander • Gabriella Davis • Lisa Hill • Matt Klima • Thomas Parrish
Nyles Sanna • Ricky Felton • Josh Kahn • Ester Oyeneyin • Katie Potvin • Raymond Williams • John Calkins • Adam Castelbaum • Dialo Flucas • Leslie McGovern
Megan Rollyson • Matthew Rossomondo • Marima Saffa

Country Blues.....Chris English

BRIEF INTERMISSION

Blues Poetry.....Nancy Mitchell

The Chris English Band and Friends.....Grayson English - bass
Greg Schneider – drums
Jessica English - piano

BLUES IN THE BLACK BOX

Blues as a song style first emerges in the late 1870s-1890s. The original blues is a type of folk music and expression created by the first generation of African Americans after slavery. Many styles of blues would evolve from this original style, which is now termed "Country Blues." Country Blues is a mixture of West African musical traditions and existing European song styles and harmony. Here are some of the elements that would contribute to the original style.

West African Musical Traditions

The blues incorporated musical practices that originated in Africa and were preserved in America.

- *Polyrhythms* – Combining different beats into a complex layered pattern. African music emphasized rhythm over harmony.
- *Blue-notes* – "Flatted" notes in the major scale 3, 5 and 7 that glide or hover between the fixed pitch.
- *Vocal Techniques* – Using variety, from course guttural tones to falsetto, to give the melody expression and can also change the meaning. (Music as Language)
- *Imitation* – Using an instrument or the voice to imitate another sound.
- *Call and Response* – A form of musical conversation with a (solo) leader and (choral) followers.
- *Halam / Kora* – Stringed African instruments that developed into the banjo in America.
- *Frailing* – The technique of plucking a stringed instrument with the fingers, instead of picking or strumming.
- *Griot* – A trained professional musician and storyteller, through oral tradition, a "walking library." The itinerant bluesman in the South parallels the Griot, being part of but remaining outside of society.
- *Improvisation* – Freely joining in song and dance using vocal, rhythm and instruments. Traditionally in Africa, music was part of life and accompanied both celebrations and daily activities. There were songs for planting, mourning, playing etc.
- *Pentatonic Scale* – A five-note scale (playable on the black keys of the piano).
- *Slide* – Originating in Africa, it was played on a zither. In America, a glass bottleneck or knife is pressed against the strings of a guitar, which allowed early blues musicians to approximate on their guitars the sounds and the phrasings of the human voice.
- *Whooping* – A form of yodeling, a sudden jumping into the falsetto traditional among the tribes of Angola and the Congo, especially the pygmies in the area, who use whoops as musical embellishments. Whooping survived in America through the field hollers or "Arhoolies."

Song Origins

West African traditions were mixed with European harmony and song styles to form blues. These can be divided into two main categories: Spirituals and Seculars.

- ***Spirituals*** – Anglo-hymns were the basis for the spirituals, and when the slaves applied their musical traditions and concerns to the hymns they would evolve into African American spirituals.
  - *Congregational* – Preaching with responses or the whole congregational singing, also "Holy" dancing and ring shouts.
  - *Street Singing* – The revivalist, typically a soloist (duo-background vocal) with instrumental (guitar) accompaniment. These musicians parallel the country blues singer musically, with the difference, of course, being the spiritual lyrics.

- ***Seculars*** – Folk songs of satire, complaint, caution, derision or praise. The tradition of being able to verbalize publicly in song what could not be said to a person's face not only lived on among Afro-Americans throughout slavery, it also continued to be a central feature of black expressive culture in freedom.
  - *Work songs* – West African tribes used songs to coordinate collective labor. Chores all had their musical counterparts. The composing of work songs, like most African American folk music, was done spontaneously and collectively; it usually expressed an immediate concern or referred to a recent event.
  - *Field Hollers or Arhoolies* – Another family of black folk music sung without instruments, yet still closely related to the blues, comprised the whoops, hollers, calls, cries and arhoolies, as they were called, that had been commonplace among southern African Americans since the antebellum plantation days.
  - *Children's or Play Songs* – Comprised of kissing games, hiding games, ring games, dancing games and lullabies
  - *Dances* – Comprised of country reels, square dances, fiddle songs, jigs and waltzes.
  - *Ragtime* – A dance originating on the plantation in the 1840s and played on the banjo with a syncopated duple meter associated with hand clapping. The dance was a sort of clogging that was called a "rag." Ragtime songs would make up material for the minstrel show and be popularized by vaudeville and sheet music sales due to its adaptability to the piano. Ragtime would remain popular into the 1900s and would contribute to the development of blues and jazz.
  - *Ballads* (Afro–American Folk Ballads) – Narrative folksongs loosely modeled after the traditional Anglo–American ballads sung all over the South, but particularly in the Appalachian region. Legendary tricksters and folk heroes like John Henry were often featured.
  - *Jump Ups* – Simple songs or repetitive phrases with a simple melody made up to suit the moment. Jump ups aren't quite fully developed songs yet but parts or building blocks for folk songs that would come.
  - *Popular* – Tin Pan Alley hits or songs written for sale. These were distributed as sheet music and presented to the public through the minstrel shows and later the more sophisticated vaudeville shows.